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Taking fire safety to work

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At an early age, we're taught and practice different survival techniques in the event of a fire at home or school. But do you know what to do if there's a fire at your workplace?

Fires and explosions were responsible for nearly 150 workplace deaths in the United States in 2013, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Fortunately, there are several things employers can do to help ensure the safety of their employees, said Lorraine Carli, vice president – Outreach and Advocacy, National Fire Protection Association.

Carli recommends employers follow all local fire codes and requirements for their building as well as educate their workers on fire safety and exit procedures. A good way to do this, Carli said, is by holding regular fire drills.

Workers can also take responsibility for their own safety. Carli said every employee should know where the building's fire exits are located — having at least two ways out — and help keep these areas free of clutter in case of an emergency.

"Don't block exits or stairwells," she said. "Also, pay attention to the smoke alarm. If you hear it, adhere to the alarm system's voice commands, if it has them, or exit the building immediately. If there's smoke, crawl low under it."

Each October, the NFPA designates a week to remind the public of the significance of fire safety. This year's Fire Prevention Week campaign, which runs Oct. 4-10, highlights the importance of having working smoke alarms in the house.

Carli said many tips provided in the campaign can also be applied at the workplace.

"You can do a number of workplace activities such as take the Fire Prevention Week quiz from www.firepreventionweek.org, distribute tip sheets on fire safety, invite the local fire department to talk about safety, hold a fire drill, provide quick lessons on various fire safety themes and raffle off smoke alarms," Carli said. "You can also use your internal communication channels such as intranets, TV, etc., to share important safety messages."

Once employees know what to do in the event of a fire at the workplace, Carli encourages them to take that knowledge home.

“This year’s Fire Prevention Week theme is ‘Hear the Beep Where You Sleep,’ so make sure your home has a working smoke alarm in every bedroom,” Carli said. “Also, develop and practice an escape plan with your family.”

For more information on workplace fire safety, visit www.firepreventionweek.org or <https://safety.army.mil>.